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EDITORIAL NOTES

One of the most interesting educational problems which in the near future will press for a solution relates to the teaching of religion. At present, this question is in the background, held in abeyance temporarily by an act of parliament, but it has been, by no means, finally settled. At this time the situation represents merely an armistice that the combatants, winded by a prolonged and relentless warfare, may regain their breath. As long, however, as education remains a topic of general interest, the subject of religion may be expected to claim the attention of the teacher because it seems to stand for something that we need in human character.

The relation of religion to general education forms an interesting chapter of our history. The schools, at one time, were supposed to be essentially religious, being largely in the control of the clergy. One of their chief functions was to provide suitable training for the ministers of the gospel. But, with the rapid development of the country's material resources, religious instruction gradually became differentiated from secular, until at last they parted company entirely. This was because religion was anchored to a few dogmatic propositions that were held to admit of neither change nor question. It therefore dropped behind, and with many intelligent people it fell into disrepute.

The most virile thing in human life is a question; as a means of conquest and achievement, the interrogation point is mightier than the sword. The first symptom of moral decadence in a man, an enterprise, or an institution is found in the refusal to entertain an honest question. The vitality of anything is measured by its power to withstand the probes of Why and Wherefore. As religion became more and more restive under the questioning ordeal that was being applied to all secular matters, it gradually ceased to have a potent influence in the public schools.

The segregation of religious instruction has progressed until it is now found chiefly in the divinity schools, where it leads a hypersensitive existence, picking up crumbs from a full table where it once presided as host. Instead of breathing the atmosphere of religious life in everything they do in school, as they once did, the children now have to get their pious ozone from an occasional prayer-meeting, or once a week from an hour in the Sunday school. Even these sources of religious education are showing some drouthy symptoms. Not long ago, a conference of divinity-school teachers gave more or less anxious consideration to the fact that divinity students are diminishing in numbers. Prayer-meetings are not any longer strong rivals of the thousand and one other things that may be set for Wednesday evening, and from the nature of the case an hour a week in the Sunday school must wield but a limited influence. Nobody nowadays would seriously attempt to teach anything—even reading—under such unfavorable conditions.

In American schools there are three R's, but in the German schools there are four: readin', 'ritin', 'rithmetic, and religion.

Educational Four R's In Germany, religion touches elbows on the daily program with geography on the one side and arithmetic on the other, and no one can doubt that it wields a strong organizing influence in their schools, as it once did in our own. For, when all other motives fail, as a last resort they can fall back upon religion and make the pupils learn their spelling, their grammar, and arithmetic, for the glory of God. Indeed, this motive was once held very closely before children in the schools everywhere, and, now that it has been taken away by legal enactment, it is pertinent to consider what we have put in its place.

The decadence of religion, so far as it is represented by an organized human institution, has been steady since the latter part of the eighteenth century, and within the past forty years its decline has been rapid. Religion, as we know it in history, has never been quite steady upon its feet since the thinking of Voltaire, Jefferson, Franklin, Paine, Henry, and a host of others finally overthrew the dogma which

Decadence of Religion

asserted the divine right of kings. Religious deterioration, already well advanced, was immeasurably hastened, when Darwin published *The Origin of Species*. Because the theory of evolution naturally led to a close investigation of three great tenets to which religion has always tenaciously clung—those pertaining to the soul, immortality, and God—and because it seemed likely that out of such study a reversal of opinion concerning the three dogmas might occur, the world at once jumped to the illogical conclusion that we, therefore, should have no further need of any religion. To this *non sequitur* from a superficial study of evolution, more than to anything else, we owe the present indifference in public and private morals.

In discussing the relation of religion to education, it is almost impossible to bring anyone down to the real point at issue. At the recent national meeting of school superintendents one of the topics before a general session was "Moral and Religious Education in the Public Schools." Both of the principal speakers were voluminous in their attempts to outline *moral* instruction, but neither one said a word about instruction in religion. This can mean but one of three things: first, that they were ignorant on the subject, for which they may be excused; second, that they were afraid of it, for which, if true, they should be ashamed of themselves; and, third, that religion is included in morality—an assumption by no means generally granted. Of course, the real trouble in such a discussion is that, when we are told a man "has religion" (a shocking phrase, utterly lacking in *finesse*), we first endeavor to orient him as a Presbyterian, a Methodist, a Baptist, a Catholic, a Quaker, or something else; once this is done, his religious quality is easily determined by the solution of a simple and definite formula as mechanical and bloodless as the binomial theorem. It is the habit that people have of thinking of religious instruction only in the terms of some ecclesiastical denomination that offers the greatest obstacle to teaching religion in the schools. When anyone has the hardihood to attempt to set up some sort of ideal for religious education, the various sects, with small exception, sit watching with blinking eyes and drooling chops ready to fall upon it and

**Difficulty in
Definition**

**Denomina-
tions as
Obstacles**

upon each other, the instant anyone discovers that his own particular theological formula has not been followed.

However, it is not the intention, primarily, at this time to rub salt into sore spots; nor is it the purpose to invite trouble by trying to define religion or by attempting to outline a course of religious instruction. It is proposed, though, to point out one thing so conspicuously absurd that it seems as if it might be easily remedied to the everlasting betterment of the schools and the race.

**A Palpable
Absurdity**

The ideal of every religion has at some time found its incarnation in a living character. There is not a nation on the globe, outside of the jungles, that is not ensphered by the vitalizing influence of some such leader. These men, springing up centuries apart and in the remote places of the earth, were, each in his own time and place, the spiritual progenitors of a great people. Naturally these masterful prophets became a controlling force in the organization of whatever educational system such peoples may have developed. Now, here is the absurdity: while we are permitted, and expected, in shaping the ideals of the children, to make use of all the great influences of the past, in this American nation we are now barred by legal enactment from all reference to the one character which is incomparably the greatest in history. We

**Blind
Prejudice**

may teach anything we please from Moses to Theodore Roosevelt—Buddha, Confucius, Mahomet, Washington, Benedict Arnold, anybody—if we except singly and alone the life of Jesus Christ. This, however, we must avoid as we would a contagion. Upon this point, the future will hold us convicted of inexplicable and indefensible folly. In this regard our present educational system represents neither philosophy, science, nor sense; we are the victims of mob control. We are playing an unholy farce. At Christmas we teach as neither myth nor fact, but as a strange confusion of the

**What We
Teach**

two, something about a heavenly heralded birth; and again at Easter we try to draw a doubtful analogy between the sprouting of seeds and the resurrection of the body—matters, by themselves, whether al-

legorical or real, having the least imaginable significance in human life. Of the great Teacher we must say nothing. As to his boyhood spent at the bench with his carpenter father; or his youth in which he developed a marvelous insight concerning the essentials of human character; or his manhood absolutely given over to teaching the plainest truths in the plainest manner—as to all these really stimulating influences of his matchless life, as set forth in his teachings, we must remain silent. The result is when the pupils leave school, instead of representing as it should, inflexible adherence to principle, unyielding devotion to duty, the cross of Christ now has no more significance for our children than has Hercules' club or the trident of Neptune. The "unspeakable Turk" is more deserving of respect; he is sincere enough, at least, in his fealty to Mahomet to base his educational system upon the teachings of his great prophet.

Everyone acknowledges the tremendous educational effect produced by the study of a fine character. Our schools need now, and they always will need, the all-compelling personal influence of the life of Jesus. As the meridian sun seizes upon the seed lying in the darkened earth, and forces the expansion of leaf and flower and the ripening of the fruit, just so His teachings, as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount and in the parables, when learned and applied in the affairs of everyday life, must develop an irresistible spiritual control in the direction of righteousness.

That there is some general sense of this need is evidenced by the almost clandestine attempt to readmit the Bible into the schools by the back door because of its claims as literature—apparently understanding literature to be largely a matter of euphonious sounds. It is as though we expected to make our children righteous by having them intone assemblages of pretty, but washed-out and meaningless, words. Whereas, unless we can persuade ourselves that present-day graft is an allegory, we need the Bible chiefly for neither its fables nor its myths, but for the straight-out-from-

**Essentials
Omitted**

**Influence of
Jesus**

**Literature
More Than
Euphony**

the-shoulder teachings that Jesus and the prophets leveled toward the evils of their day. Therefore, along with **Wanted:** the piety of the heathen philosophers, I would see **Direct** the piety of the heathen philosophers, I would see **Teaching** practically worked into every year of school life, and all the years thereafter, the plain and simple, the beautiful and understandable, teachings of Christ. If that means teaching religion, then teach it; if it means bringing the Bible into the public schools, bring it in—with all sincerity, candor, and earnestness, fetch it in.

This appeal is not made, chiefly, to those who in the past have stood most urgently, perhaps, for so-called religious instruction.

But few of such advocates are able to rid themselves of the notion that one's religion is inextricably mixed up with irrelevant beliefs that always must rest upon a speculative foundation. Nor is it made to that other large class of people who mistake indifference for tolerance. Least of all is the appeal made to the clergymen and the church; through nineteen hundred years of strife they have at last fought each other to a standstill. The address is, rather, to those of a younger generation having a clearer and broader vision who, from the fact that they are conscious of no religion whatever, are the best fitted to become the progenitors of the new. It must be made, strangely enough, to the men of science; for the axioms of conduct as laid down by Christ are more in harmony with the principles of evolution than they are with the dogmas of the old theology. It is the paradox of **Science vs. Theology** history that theology and not science is responsible for the present estrangement of religion from education.

The teachings of Jesus are needed in the schools to reinforce everything else we do that makes for character. If the children could really be taught that grapes grow not on **Influences** thorns, nor figs on thistles; if they could be made **Now Lacking** to feel the brotherhood of man through the story of the vine and the branches; if they could but once be shown the strait gate and made to realize the stupendous folly of any other way; if these, and a hundred other lessons of like import,

could be ground into their character so as to furnish the permanent background of all their thinking—a single generation of children so taught would be able to make human life on this planet the splendid thing that is hoped for in the millenium.

W. S. J.